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CHAPTER XIII

OMENS

NATURAL PHENOMENA AS OMENS

The Bedouin does not think deeply on religious matters and follows no rules in his religious observances. Nevertheless, he guides himself in all his social and private undertakings by certain fixed customs, observes the various natural phenomena, and pays heed to internal impulses and dreams which he holds to be signs or warnings sent to him by spiritual beings who wish him either good or ill. He is a firm believer in the existence of spirits and thinks it absolutely necessary to do all that is agreeable and avoid what is disagreeable to them. Woe to him, if he should anger them! To do so would frustrate all his undertakings. And anger them he would, should he not be careful in his words and actions nor give due regard to days of portent and certain signs both visible and invisible.

When a Rwejli despatches a man on an affair of importance, he must not use the word "*Ruḥ*," "Go!" or "Run!" He must not say: "Ride in the direction of the settlement of Baḳ'a" or "of the al-Lmât wells." All these words invite death. For the verb *râḥ, ruḥ,* is used in connection with death or departure from this world. *Baḳ'a'* signifies a violent death, and *al-lmât* also reminds one of destruction, or death. Therefore they are likely to say "*Erŝed*" for "Go!" or "Run," instead of *ruḥ* and to substitute for the topographical names Baḳ'a' or al-Lmât the term Ṭajjebt Ism, which, referring to a settlement or a well, means "the name is a good omen."

More important matters the Rwejli prefers to leave either till noon or at least till the dew has fully departed or to despatch them before the fresh dew has fallen. These times of the day he considers the most favorable, because the spirits are then resting. But there is no day without some meaning attached to it — it is either suitable for an undertaking or not. These significations are called *waǧba* or *waǧḥ*; the favorable ones being *zên*, the unfavorable *ŝên*. The best days on

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When yawning the Rwejli must also be very cautious, as the throat opens wide during this process and the demon then may let a drop of its urine, *jebûleh*, fall into the man's throat; the urine enters the stomach and causes various diseases.

The Bedouins should also watch the stars most carefully, because they have more properties unfavorable to man than favorable. Wounds will not heal when pierced by the rays of either the stars or the sun. Therefore the wounded person is laid, wrapped in all sorts of covers, in some corner of the tent so as to keep the rays away from him. Whenever people came to me with one of their wounded relatives, they first pitched a small tent behind the one occupied by me, closed it tightly, and then — not before — proceeded to uncover the wound. If a Rwejli loses his way at night, the stars are to blame, for he took his course from a certain star which changed its position imperceptibly, making the man take a wrong direction. Therefore he will not say *"Tiht*, I lost my way," but *"Enǧemt*, I was led astray by the stars." When the stars begin to play with a Rwejli in this manner, even the North Star cannot be depended upon. The best thing to do in that case is to lie down and wait for sunrise. Then the Rwejli can take his bearings himself according to the landmarks and continue his journey.

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CHAPTER XV

SPIRITS AND VOWS

The Rwala believe that besides this visible world there is also an invisible, or spiritual, world. The spiritual world is again divided into a celestial and an earthly world. The inhabitants of the celestial world are called *malak* (pl., *malâjika*), those of the spiritual earthly world *ǧânn* (pl., *ǧinn*). Both the celestial and earthly spirits were created by Allâh. They possess bodies similar to human bodies but invisible; they can pass through any wall and can cover in a short while a distance which even a good rider would travel in barely a month. The spirits hear, speak, eat, drink, and ride like any Bedouin but feel no pain, are never sick, and cannot die.

The celestial spirits do not leave heaven except when sent by Allâh to men. A *malak* announcing Allâh's will to the Bedouin is called *munâbi*, spokesman. He does so only during a dream, whether natural or artificial, the latter occurring when a waking person falls into ecstasy, *islâm*, under the influence of music or dancing.

THE ǦINN

To the earthly spirits, *ǧinn*, *harâfîl*, or *ǧenûn*, heaven is not accessible. They are of both sexes and have big eyes extending to the corners of their mouths. The food they prefer is raw meat, *nej*, and fresh blood is their favorite drink. The raw meat they get from fallen animals, the blood is left for them by the Bedouins every time an animal is killed. The *ǧinn* are divided into tribes, clans, and families like the Bedouins, but in reality are settlers, *ḥaẓar*. They live in high mountains, inaccessible ravines, and old ruins. They never have tents. Their dens are situated underground in rock crevices, caverns, and vaults of deserted buildings. The farther such a ravine or ruin is from the water, the better it is liked by the spirits, who know that they will not be disturbed there. They occupy themselves in raising goats and sheep, which their herdsmen pasture in regions so rocky and stony that the goats and sheep

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776 belonging to human beings would die of hunger there. Camels and horses are not raised by them.

776 Woe to the Bedouin who falls asleep in a region inhabited by the spirits! For if a *ǧânnijje* observes him, she crawls into 828 his body either through his nostrils, forefinger, or big toe, and, as soon as she gets hold of him, she makes him jump 755 up and run into the desert, whence he can be brought back to his tent only by force. A man so possessed is known as *maḫšûš* or *muharfal*. To cure him, a seer, *râʿ as-sirr*, is called in, who, after working himself into an ecstasy, commands the female spirit to come out: "Crawl out, crawl out! *eṭlaʿî eṭlaʿi*." her answer being: "I will not, I will not crawl out, *mâ-ṭlaʿ*." Then the sorcerer orders his disciples to play louder and faster, he himself circling and dancing round the possessed with increasing vigor, finally lies down upon him and again shouts: "Crawl out and away with thee to the place whence thou camest! *eṭlaʿî maʿ makâneč min alli ǧîti minneh*." It takes some time for a female spirit to be driven out, because a woman is headstrong and will not obey.

A Ḳmâṣi spent a night in some ruins west of the al-ʿAzîb valley and perceived a *ǧânnijje* there, who instantly entered his body. He then ran into the neighboring hills and would not return home when found by his relatives, but threw himself on the ground, struck out at them, and frothed at the mouth. This showed him to be possessed, *maḫšûš*. A sorcerer was sent for. He played over him, *laʿab*, for several days, but the *ǧânnijje* tormented him still more. Then they began to beat him so that blood began to trickle from almost every limb of his body. The beating of a man possessed is permitted, for the blows are not meant for him but for the female spirit, and it is she who feels the pain, not the man. It is observed that the *ǧânnijje* shakes her victim less violently after the beating, and they then beat him only at intervals. On the twenty-fourth day the *ǧânnijje* finally left the bruised body for good, the prolonged beating having proved too much for her. The man, of course, recovered immediately afterwards.

513 The Bedouin does not like to sleep long, as many dangers lurk about him during sleep, not only from men but also from the earthly spirits, and, moreover, sleep reminds him of death. A Bedouin saying is: "He that sleeps one third of the night has done as well as he that sleeps all night, and he that sleeps the whole night will wake up an idiot; *min nâm ṯilṯ al-leǧl*

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nâmha killaha w-min nâm kill al-lejl haḏâk ḥabîl." Sleep during the hot midday, *ḳajjalna*, or at sunrise, *ṣaffarna*, is preferred to the night sleep. This is also the time when the animals are allowed to rest. 613

Women and girls are in constant danger from the male spirits. If a girl, especially a pretty one, falls asleep in a locality inhabited by the spirits, she is approached by a male spirit, who has sexual intercourse with her yet without violating her virginity. Should he succeed in that only once, the girl cannot resist him ever afterwards. He compels her to leave her tent at night and to come to a place selected by him. Such a woman or girl must not marry; should she do so voluntarily the spirit would torment her still more, and if she is compelled to marry the spirit would attack her husband. 776 833

Me'zel eben 'Eḳla' of the Mwâhîb married a pretty widow, a relative of his, who was dominated by a *ǧânn* and was therefore unwilling. When on the wedding night he approached her, the *ǧânn* seized him by the throat, throttled him, and then threw him out of the tent, threatening him with death should he dare to approach her again. Such a husband expelled by a spirit is called *menḥi*. But a spirit can never beget children by a woman, as spirits never have any children at all.

The wells of the watering place of Lîne are very deep, hewn in the rock spirally, and have smooth walls. According to a Bedouin tale, a chief's pretty daughter was often molested at night by a *ǧânn*. When she complained to her father he lay in wait for the spirit and finally caught him on the night of *aṣ-ṣarra*, or of the dark of the moon. The chief tied the *ǧânn* both hands and feet, seated him on the rocky plain of Lîne, and commanded him to keep on circling around until his posteriors should dig a well with spring water in the rock. The *ǧânn* began to do as he was bidden, his back grinding out the rock and his head pressing up the sand, which was changed by his sweat into a thin dough. Yet no sooner had he deepened one well that the chief made him dig a second, a third, and so on, urging him on with the words: "Soften the rock, soften the rock, and change it into dough! *lîni lîneh w-erdih 'aǧîne.*"

Not long ago some travelers, *rab' aṭ-ṭrûš*, rode by the impassable crags of al-'Afâjef in the deep depression of al-Ka'ara. Below a hillside there a hedgehog, *ḳunfud*, of extraordinary size was warming himself in the rays of the sun. 776 825

776 825 Dismounting, one of the travelers caught the animal and put it into his empty saddle bag, intending to kill and roast it at their next halting place, as the hedgehog's flesh is regarded as having a very savory taste. But before long they heard a female voice crying: "O Manṣûr, O Manṣûr, where art thou?" Turning around they saw an elderly woman running after them, repeating the call. Finally the hedgehog's voice was heard out of the bag: "Manṣûr lies curled up in a small bag, *al-manṣûr bwaṣṭ al-ḫurǧ maṣrûr*." This frightened the riders so much that the man with the bag threw the hedgehog on the ground, and the animal, instantly changing into a man, ran towards the woman.

One Ǧirân walad Dẖejjel found near al-'Afâjef a solitary sheep. Thinking that it had gone astray from some flock in the neighborhood, he tried to catch and bring it to its owner. A lost animal of this kind is called *ḫwâr*, and its finder receives a reward for returning it. But our sheep was not a *ḫwâr* at all but a sheep from a *ǧânn* flock, for it ran into a steep crag where there was not the smallest opening and disappeared in a second.

Old ruins also are favorite hiding places of the *ǧinn*. There they either live in the shape of long snakes or else they enter snakes' bodies, *maskûn*, and dwell there permanently. Therefore whoever kills a snake among old ruins makes the spirits his enemies. But should he roast and eat such a snake, he would bring the spirit into his own body and become possessed. On the other hand, in the wide, level desert where the spirits never live, any long snake can be killed and eaten with impunity.

In the great church in the ruins of ar-Reṣâfa there lives — according to the Rwala — a long, black snake, *dâbb*, with the head of a goat and a white spot on its forehead. The oldest Bedouins say that it is very old and relate that the same serpent had been known to their forefathers. It fears nobody, probably knowing with what fear it is regarded by the Bedouin population of the whole neighborhood.

Near the well of Wâḳṣa, south of the oasis of Tejma, a treasure is said to be guarded by a *ǧânn* in the shape of a *dâbb* snake.

In the castle of al-Ḫafâǧi, formerly owned by the Âl Aẖejẓer or Eben Aẖejẓer kin, the Rwala claim once to have seen a long snake or dragon with a human head, bird's feet, and lion's back, which did not stir even when they came close to

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it. This calmness so terrified the curious Bedouins that they instantly took to their heels.

In the *šeʿîb* of al-Čaʿči which opens into the valley of al-Člâbât stands a large boulder facing eastwards and entirely covered with curious marks. This boulder is a place of pilgrimage for the *ǧinn*, who gather there in the end of May to kill their sacrificial animals. They were seen performing these rites by the Ṣḳûr clan subject to the chief Eben Haḍḍâi.

At aš-Šubejče there are a few large black boulders said to be inhabited by *ǧinn*. Close to them yawns the opening of an ancient well from which they water their herds.

In the neighborhood of Ǧâwa and Ǧennâwa lie many boulders shaped like cows. A long time ago the *ǧinn* kept a herd of cows there, which pastured on grass grown on firm soil as well as on the *rimṭ* and *ṛaẓa'* thriving only in sand. Allâh, however, forbade them to raise cows and transformed the cows into boulders. *Ǧâwa w-ǧennâwa behen ḥaǧarât lowm al-baḳarât bên ad-dimṭ w-ar-rimṭ w-al-ṛaẓa'.*

Near the ridge of Lâha the *ǧinn* have an underground village; also near Bâjer and al-Mwejsen.

In the wide level desert delightful music may often be heard and pretty girls seen coaxing the traveler to join them. But woe to him who succumbs! The girls will tickle him to death, suck out his blood, and devour his flesh. As my companion, Blejhân, related: "Once I went with three of my comrades on a marauding trip, our goal being the pastures of the Sirḥân tribe at the southern foot of the Ḥawrân. When already near our destination we were surprised in a deep gully by a strong troop of our enemies of the Ṣḥûr tribe and were scattered in several directions. I luckily got out of the volcanic rocks into the level Ḥamâd desert, where I rested at night, squatting by my camel and filling my short pipe, *sebîl*. Some days before, it had broken in the middle and I had repaired it by replacing the stem with a piece of bone and tying it to the bowl with a strip of leather. A pipe thus mended is called *bûz* or *bazbûzt as-sebîl*. Having filled it with tobacco, I wrapped my head and the pipe in my cloak, so that the sparks flying from it and the smoke could not be seen from a distance; *ṭarâmaṭṭ bel-ʿaba' ʿan bazbûzt as-sebîl lâ tenšâf*. Suddenly I heard a sound as if somebody were running in front of me. Raising the cloak a little, I looked round but saw nothing and thought it might have been a wild beast, a wolf perhaps. Some

776 823 time after this, *'oḳob mišwâr*, I heard singing and the beating of a drum. This time I looked up with more attention — and there, right before me, shadows of dancing girls were flitting. And yet there was no camp near. The girls went within a stone's throw of me, beckoned to me, smiled, and tried in various ways to draw me towards them. But I pressed my face close to the ground and hugged it as tight as I could with my whole body so as to see and hear nothing. Then I fell asleep."

A Rwejli was riding at night through the al-Ḥadîṭa ruins in the Sirḥân depression. Suddenly he heard the voices of women rejoicing, *zaṛârît*, and calling: "Welcome to thee! welcome to thee! *jâ hala bak jâ hala*." A little while afterwards he was surrounded by pretty girls who asked him to dance with them, but when our Rwejli pronounced, *samma*, the word Allâh, the girls suddenly vanished.

At another time a small troop of migrating Rwala arrived late in the evening at al-Ḥadîṭa. As there was good pasture in the neighborhood they pitched their tents and, being very fatigued by their long march, lay down to sleep, from which they did not awake till the sun was up. But their surprise may be imagined when on rising they found their tents struck, rolled together, and ready to be loaded on the camels. They loaded them with all the speed possible and at once rode from a place evidently inhabited by malevolent *ǧinn*.

824 776 In every tree and bush of the *sidr* and *'awseǧ* variety there lives a spirit, and for this reason the wood of these thorny trees and bushes must not be used for fuel. Where the *sidr* trees grow in a cluster, the *ǧinn* have their gardens, as for instance at al-Obejjeẓ, Sejdarân, and al-'Âmeẓ.

776 854 Some of the earthly spirits are given to harming men and take on various shapes for that purpose. They have various names. Of these most dreaded by the Bedouins is a female spirit called *sar'at aš-šibe*. In appearance she is a tall thin woman wearing a dress made of leather. This spirit wanders about the desert from camp to camp, looking for children. If she hears a child crying, she crawls near, gropes about for it with her hands till she finds it, then catches it, and runs with it to her own kin. There the child is torn partly open, its blood sucked by all the spirits present, and its flesh devoured raw. Therefore mothers try to frighten their crying child with the warning: "Keep quiet or *as-sar'a* will come for thee!" To protect a child from the spirits the Rwala women

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hang the cradle, *rûǧâḥa*, which is made of a quilted cover and has a rope tied to its four corners, high up to the tent poles. If, then, *as-sar'a* comes into the tent, she looks for the child on the beds made on the floor and takes no notice of the cradle hanging from above.

Another evil spirit appears in the shape of a big greyhound bitch, *seleḳa*, with an enormous jaw and a breastbone, *zowr*, reaching to the ground. This spirit, known as *sa'aluwwa*, is the only spirit which appears in the wide level desert and lives in dens such as are used by the hyenas. A traveler, *ṭurḳi*, a member of the Mseke kin which belongs to the 'Ebede division, once met what he thought to be a *seleḳa* in the desert. He made it come to him, believing that it might lead him to the camp it had left. But instead of being a *seleḳa*, it proved to be a *sa'aluwwa* who jumped at him, tore flesh from his breast and face, sucked his blood, and did not leave him till he was half dead. When finally found by other travelers, all he could do was to tell what had happened to him before departing this life, *râḥ*.

A *ḳurṭa* or *ḳârûẓ* is a spirit who destroys newly born boys but does his work unobserved. If a Rwejli is married to a woman who has borne him several boys all of whom have died after a short time, and if the same thing happens also with the second wife, then he knows for certain that it is a *ḳurṭa* who has done him this wrong. To appease the spirit he procures a cock with green feathers on its neck and waits until his wife comes to childbed again. When her time is near, with the live cock he draws in his tent seven circles, one within the other, kills the cock in the seventh in the center, buries it there, and lays his wife over that spot. She will then bear without any pain, and her son will not die, because the *ḳurṭa* has been given what belonged to it. *Ḥakk al-ḳârûẓ*.

REVERENCE FOR GRAVES RARE AMONG BEDOUINS

The Bedouins know of no communion with the saints. In the whole inner desert there is not a single holy grave or shrine erected in honor of a saint. In fact they have no saints whatever. When they make their short sojourns in the settled territory, where by every village the dome of a shrine rises above the real or imaginary grave of some man or woman